

*Nothing is politically right  
that is morally wrong.*



*Free and fair discussion  
is the firmest friend of truth.*

## MISSOURI SENATE JEFFERSON CITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Senate Committee Hears Bill to Improve Ethics Standards** *Senate Leader Shields Proposes Three Accountability and Transparency Measures*

JEFFERSON CITY – Ethics standards for elected officials may soon be expanded if legislation presented to the Senate Rules, Joint Rules, Resolutions and Ethics Committee today passes. Senate Bill 577, sponsored by Senate Leader Charlie Shields creates the position of an independent investigator within the Ethics Commission, bars contributions to incumbent officials during session, and expands income reporting requirements to include legislative staff.

Shields, R-St. Joseph, told the committee the need for new ethics reforms was spurred by the resignation of three elected officials last year due to ethics violations.

“Ethics violations are unacceptable, especially because of the damage they cause to the public’s trust in our democratic process,” he said. “I believe we should examine every idea presented that brings more transparency and accountability to the process in every way possible. No idea should be ignored if it helps improve the ethical climate of elected officials.”

The measure, Senate Bill 577, would create the Office of Independent Investigation within the Ethics Commission to investigate potential ethics violations and file ethics complaints. Complaints filed by the office would continue to be handled in the same manner.

“By creating this office, we would bring a new level of accountability to Missouri,” he said. “Currently, it is up to citizens to file complaints, but this would mean we would have a full-time independent office dedicated solely to investigating and filing ethics complaints.”

The measure would also bar lobbyists from contributing to any incumbent legislator’s candidate committee, incumbent governor’s candidate committee, any continuing committee, or any campaign committee during the regular session of the General Assembly that runs from January to May. The prohibition would also apply to any incumbent governor’s candidate committee or and any continuing or campaign committee when legislation from the regular session awaits gubernatorial action. A lobbyist is defined as someone who is employed to influence legislation on a regular basis.

“We should work to avoid even the appearance of conflicts of interest,” Shields said. “And if the courts deny this approach, we will look to other ways to improve timely reporting during session for both incumbents and challengers.”

The final provision would require all employees and staff of the General Assembly, including employees of the majority and minority caucuses of both chambers, to file yearly financial interest statements disclosing supplemental income received totaling \$5,000 or more. The disclosure must include the source of the income and the general nature of the business conducted.

“Because of the close nature and influence staff can have on the lawmakers they work for, we should hold our staff to the same standards of income disclosure,” he said.

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